

## MYTHOLOGIZATION OF THE SOVIET REALITY AND ISTORIZATION OF 'THE SOVIET MYTH' IN THE RUSSIAN PROSE OF THE END OF THE XX CENTURY

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Annotation: The article considers the strategies for myth-making in the field of comprehending the Soviet reality and historical facts of the Soviet state on the broad material of the post-realist prose of the late XX century. Particular attention is paid to such postulates of Soviet ideology as the idea of Unity, universal equality, possibility of building the most just state in a single country. In the course of analysis, we touched upon the issues of dominant type of a hero and the chronotope specifics. On the example of the works of A. Melikhov, V. Pelevin, S. Esin, M. Kharitonov, V. Zalotukha, we demonstrated the ambiguity of the concept of 'marginal hero' in the context of Soviet mythology, touched upon the issue of ritualizing the existence of human in the conditions of a totalitarian state. The combination of discrete and closed chronological models in the texts correlates with the idioms of the 'Soviet myth' and the influence of genre canons of utopia and anti-utopia. We paid particular attention to the reception of the 'Soviet myth' postulates reflected in the Soviet literature and in the modern prose. The observed intertextual roll-calls are built on the principle of attraction/repulsion, rather than a parodic decline. The article also analyzes the mechanisms of the opposite direction process - the transition of the 'Soviet myth' concepts to the status of historical realities and artifacts. Such a situation is found in the social reception of ideologies not as desirable, but as real ones.

Key words: 'Soviet myth', postrealism, Russian prose of the late XX century, marginal hero, chronotop, utopia, anti-utopia.

### 1 Introduction

The steady research interest in the Soviet phenomenon has been observed in various areas of social and humanitarian knowledge since the disappearance of the Soviet Union as a state entity. More than 30 years after this historic event, the Soviet era is still conceived as a dominant component in the formation of modern Russian state and national identity.

An appeal to the Soviet past and other stages of Russian history is also due to the peculiar mental need of Russians. Thus, V.L. Kurguzov believes that an irresistible desire to 'constantly turn to history, argue about our past' (Kurguzov,2013 p. 25) is one 'of the main factors forming our culture as a whole' (Kurguzov,2013: p. 26).

In modern literary criticism, the desire to adopt the Soviet past is dictated by a number of specific reasons. Firstly, the official Soviet literature is characterized by an emphasis on ideology, that is, classical works of socialist realism may be regarded as a kind of historical document, ideological treatise. Secondly, the sociocultural situation at the turn of the XX and XXI centuries is defined as a postmodern situation, one of the typological features of which is an appeal to the ideological and cultural heritage of previous eras as a kind of 'building material'. For example, M. Epstein is inclined to interpret the Russian postmodernism as an aesthetic reaction to socialist realism (Epstein,1994 p. 289).

In this work we intentionally narrow the subject of research to the study of one of the possible forms of the Soviet reality reception – the global socio-cultural 'Soviet myth'. It is this form that dominates in the domestic literature of the late XX century.

The possibility of interpreting the Soviet mentality fixed in the forms of state structure and literature of the Soviet period as a myth is associated with an expanded interpretation of this concept by the modern philosophy and culture studies. For

example, E. Cassirer is inclined to interpret the myth as 'a method of creating a social reality and a mean of socialization at the same time, that is, including a person in this reality' (Ernst Cassirer and the Myth Philosophy,1993, p. 164).

The study of mythologization technology of the Soviet reality and ideology and the ways of understanding the 'Soviet myth' as a historically authentic reality prepares the basis for transition to the next stage of studying the modern literature. At the beginning of the XXI century, the research interest has shifted from the ideological bias of the Soviet past to microhistory, to the philosophy of everyday life. In the literature, this trend turns into a replacement of the 'Soviet myth' by the 'Soviet discourse'.

### 2 Materials and methods

The distinction between the concepts of 'Soviet myth' and 'Soviet discourse' predetermined the limitation of chronological frameworks of the phenomenon under study and the choice of artistic material. In the context of studying the 'Soviet myth', the works of Russian literature of the late XX century are very representative. The most interesting is the prose of postrealism, which takes an intermediate position between the game strategies of postmodern literature and the tendency to the realistic literature likelihood.

A systematic analysis of the 'Soviet myth' as an integral socio-cultural formation would not be possible with the use of any one of the research methods. The work uses a combination of historical-literary, cultural-historical, structural-semantic methods, as well as the elements of receptive and intertextual analysis.

The methodological basis is the works devoted to the study of the socialist realistic canon (Dobrenko ,1997; Socialist Realist Canon: collection of articles ,2000; Hosking ,1998) and the functioning mechanisms of individual and collective memory (Halbwaks ,2005; Butler ,1980; Hobsbawm ,1983; LaCapra ,2001).

### 3 Results and discussion

Postulates and maxims of the 'Soviet myth', which have become the elements of a single cultural paradigm, penetrate into the prose of the late XX century, predetermining its set of issues and the specifics of a conflict.

Undoubtedly, the main postulate is the idea of Unity. As we knew, one of the most necessary conditions for the construction of an ideal state was the ideal of a social monolith, the cult of collective. In the novel *The Yellow Arrow* by V. Pelevin this idea is hyperbolized: a person becomes an extension, a repetition that has ever existed. Hence there is the motif of duality: an indignant Peter Sergeevich is similar to Chatsky, exposing Famusov; Khan, having not shaved for a long time becomes similar to the Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune, and the author's picture of the pamphlet read by Andrey reminds one of the much thinner Nietzsche. There is even a paradoxical fashion for human faces, topical types.

From this point of view, the fact that the protagonist of the novel by A. Melikhov *The Exile from Eden* experiences especially painful not the loss of work and confusion in the country (Putsch, etc.), but the compromise of the ideal of Unity. His feeling of frustration is all the more surprising because Leo Katzenelenbolen is marginal in terms of nationality (the novel consistently holds the idea that a Jew is not a nationality but a social role of a stranger). In addition, being a disabled person, he is the so-called 'natural marginal'. However, having lost an eye in his childhood, he quickly managed to adapt in the world around him, in which he was greatly supported by the desire to become like everyone else. In the changed social conditions, the

Unity is demoted from the social ideal into a public vice. And the loss of this guiding light makes the hero helpless and vulnerable. It is significant that Edem, about which he recalls with despair, is not at all a blessed world of childhood, but the lost Unity.

The hero of another novel by A. Melikhov *Humpbacked Atlanteans* affirms the value of independent scientific thought, but does not seek to preserve his gift; on the contrary, he tries to merge with the crowd, because individuality has proved to be a heavy burden. Such an attitude to life is explained not so much by a critical gift as by a feeling of inferiority, insufficiency of one's own existence. It is not by chance that Saburov experiences disappointment in science as a loss of faith. However, this paradox is mitigated by referring to the opinion of one of the most competent science scholars, P. Feyerabend, who believes that the science is a new, most aggressive and dogmatic religious institution (Feyerabend, 1986, p. 371). From this perspective, the story of Saburov's life may be regarded as a parable about the loss of God and the desire to find it. As a new deity, Saburov firstly considers the laws of market economy that have reigned in the country, and then the observation of the unexpectedly found ritual associated with the need to take pills at a strictly certain time.

The ritual's perception by the hero as the meaning of life actualizes the eternal problem: what is more important for a human - the possibility of free choice, independent decision, or the ability to follow orders without hesitation. It is significant that Saburov re-reads *The Great Inquisitor* by Dostoevsky, intuitively guessing the link between the legend and his mental state. In the end, he comes to the conclusion that the human soul cannot be free, it needs devotion, since it frees up doubts and responsibilities. It is during the ritual that both the individual person and the collective acquire consciousness of their integrity and unity.

At the same time, the orientation toward unity as a curative remedy for the infirmity of infallibility is the cause of most disappointments and tragedies of the heroes of modern prose. That is why there is a distinct tendency to consider the history of Andrey Saburov or Lev Katsenelenbogen not as an individual tragedy of an outstanding person, but as a parable about the modern intelligentsia, the eternal search for the non-existent Absolute in the criticism.

The same important postulate of the 'Soviet myth' is the idea of the possibility to build socialism in a single country. And if the island isolation on which the protagonist of the novel by A. Melikhov *So Said Saburov* builds its ideal state is due to its geographical position in the middle of the ocean, and the ideal society in the story *The Yellow Arrow* by V. Pelevin is delineated from the rest of the world by the train walls, then, for example, the desire to create an ideal state, limiting it to a residence permit along Campanella Street, is rather absurd (*Lines of Destiny* by M. Kharitonov). This absurdity is aggravated by the situation with the corner house, which has the form of the letter G, a short jumper located already on another street: the border passes strictly along Campanella Street, cutting off part of the house, sometimes even spreading two rooms of one apartment on two sides of the border.

The artificiality, conventionality of the border of an ideal society is especially noticeable in the novel by S. Esin *The Casus, or the Effect of the Twins*: the famous Protective Shield, which, allegedly, strikes with laser beams anyone who tries to leave the Land of Universal Happiness, is in fact only a theatrical setting created by the spotlights illumination. And its lethality is not due to the achievements of technology, but to the accuracy of snipers on duty at the border.

In the novel S. Esin satirically rethinks the idea of universal equality: the heroes are equal in poverty, in a half-starved existence (for example, any woman can choose between an evening dress and a few Sunday lunches). It is interesting that

observance of a uniform standard of living is entrusted to the inhabitants of the Country of Universal Happiness and turns into a total spy mania, surveillance under the Mutual Control System. In the novel, the realities of the era of military communism are also peculiarly refracted: a person, who exposed another person having exceeded the material and product limits, is given a part of the expropriated products as a reward.

The feeling of deception spreads also in the novel by S. Esin on the idea of the most just state. It turns out that even sentencing is only a matter of the game of chance in the literal sense: the guilt/innocence of a defendant is usually decided by guessing on the outcome in some video game.

The deployment on expose of the 'Soviet myth' is particularly perceptible in the novel *Omon Ra* by V. Pelevin. So, it turns out at the plot level of the text that the legendary flights of the Soviet spacecraft to the Moon are just carefully planned dramatizations aimed at misleading the world community. The main character realises this only at the end of the story, when he turns to be in the position of the leading actor of this tragicomedy himself. However, as a premonition, knowledge about the deception of the Soviet cosmonauts achievements appears much earlier, even in the pioneer camp. For example, the eyes of the astronaut drawn on the propaganda shield as standing on the surface of the Moon seem full of anguish to small Omon. And reviewing the spacecraft model, he has discovered that there is no way out of the rocket: the hatch is painted outside, and from the inside - there is a wall with some dials.

And the space ship on which the adult Omon had to make a journey to the Moon was just a model driven by the forces of people immured in it. Therefore, a human becomes a part of this mechanism, a 'cog'. At the same time, a person turns into a zombie, unable to reason and make decisions, ready to execute any order. It is significant that the role of zombifying elements is taken not only by the mysterious medical drugs administered to cosmonauts before the flight, but also the agitation speeches of flight leaders and political instructors during the pre-flight training.

It is also important that a great goal in the name of which the state easily sacrifices the lives of several cogs is a flight to the Moon. In the context of Soviet mythology, the pilots and cosmonauts are the most striking expression of the USSR's motto - 'Forward and Higher'. However, this motif turns into its opposite in the novel by V. Pelevin: The space ship is moving not upwards, but downwards, into the catacombs of the abandoned underground lines (by the way, the metro is another significant symbol of the 'Soviet myth').

The story by V. Pelevin also reflects the myth of the USSR as the Great Family. So, Omon, having suddenly lost his determination, draws the strength in walking through the Moscow mother and talking with the political instructor - a substitute for the Great Father Stalin - before the flight.

The story plays out also the obligatory detailed questioning of those who are accepted for public service. At that, it should be verified not only the biography of the hero and all his relatives, but even his previous earthly incarnations in *Omon Ra*.

The story's composition is also predetermined by the impact of the 'Soviet myth': the plot moves according to the law of transition of quantitative changes to qualitative: every stage of the hero's life (pioneer - cadet - cosmonaut) reaches the limit of its development - a measure - sooner or later, and then there is a qualitative leap, which becomes the standard set of products of the 'border meal'.

The main provisions of the 'Soviet myth', as we have already noted above, are fixed not only in three laws of dialectics, but also in the classical works of socialist realism. Therefore, a parodic overlaying of the thesis about literature as a life textbook may become a very effective way to expose the 'Soviet

*myth*'. So, the subjects of the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* by N. Ostrovsky and *The Tale of the Real Man* by B. Polevoy are literally the basis of the novel *Omon Ra* by V. Pelevin concerning the professional training of political instructors and pilots, respectively.

But the exposure of the 'Soviet myth' is especially effective in the anti-utopian works. For example, the utopian idea of vertex forms of social development, after which further movement loses meaning, is reflected by an image of the stopped time in the story *The Yellow Arrow* by V. Pelevin. The exhausting circular statics ceases to be pathology, it turns into a norm of existence, raised to the scale of eternal law of being.

There is only one way to happiness in this world: try to find meaning in everything that happens and obey the great plan. But the ultimate goal of a journey, known to all, is a ruined bridge, that is, almost inevitable death. Thus, the attempts to build an ideal society are interpreted by V. Pelevin as being to death.

It is significant that in another anti-utopian work, the novel *The Casus, or the Effect of the Twins* by S. Esin, a sign of the state's deadness is the clouds of circling crows. And in the novel *The Great March for the Liberation of India* by V. Zalotukha, the Soviet Union, as we already noted above (Mrathuzina, 2015; p. 83), appears as the realm of the dead, as the embalmed mummy becomes the main relic of the state, as if in the ancient Woody religion.

Within the fate of one hero, the deadening principle is associated with the automatism of the human existence – the cog in the state machine. By obeying to consumer inertia, a person frees himself from the need to choose and as a result loses the ability to manage his own life. Due to this everyday automatism, a person is alienated from himself, turns into a puppet of a circular race.

#### 4 Conclusion

In the post-Stalinist prose of the end of the XX century, the quaint plot lines and conceptual constructions are created from the signs of today's reality and the elements of a so-called "Soviet myth".

At that, the myth of the USSR as a great state, cosmic power, country of the most advanced technologies grows into its opposite: a powerful empire does not show its strength, but fakes it; a regime, being unable to transform life, transforms consciousness.

As a result, the components of the 'Soviet myth' are desacralized. Moreover, they are transformed into an absurd element, which becomes a 'generator of unpredictability' (the term by I. Prigozhyn). As a consequence, the historical reality and the "secondary reality" of socialist realistic tests appear to be unstable - the chaos.

So, the dialogue with the 'Soviet myth', developing according to the logic of attraction-repulsion, brings the hero's issue to the fore, enriches the concept of a human and the world, enables us to problematize the seemingly everyday conflicts of the prose of postrealism.

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